

The University of Chicago

A STUDY OF
CHANGING SOCIAL ATTITUDES IN
THE AMERICAN INSTITUTES
OF BOLIVIA

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

1935

By
BESSIE DUNN BECK

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1. The Specific Problem and Methods of Investigation

Sociology is primarily interested in social control, in the discovery of new methods of procedure and the underlying laws and forces within society which may be consciously directed so as to improve social conditions. The natural sciences have succeeded to a large extent in securing control of the physical forces, as they have come to understand the natural laws and develop the scientific method and technique for the adaptation of these laws to the various factors within the universe. Sociology will become equally successful when it develops a rational method of control by which human behavior may be directed in accordance with natural laws in the direction of social progress.

A certain amount of success has been obtained in the control of special social groups, but this success has been more or less accidental. There has not been developed as yet the technique by which this knowledge may be passed on to others, nor has the method been verified in a large number of groups so that it can be accepted as applicable to society as a whole. It is hoped that in a careful study of special social units and their comparison with similar groups, that certain laws may be formulated which will contribute to the solution of the general problem of social control.

In a scientific investigation, it is necessary to determine what shall be the unit of measurement in denoting change. In the older psychologies, the emphasis was placed entirely on the

inner subjective processes, while newer schools ignore any process which may intervene between the stimulus and the response and place the entire emphasis on the outer objective factors. The behaviorist does not consider it of any importance to show why a certain act was performed, but seeks merely a description of the movements involved in the act. Another group of sociologists, however, believe that in the effort to discover the underlying laws and processes necessary for the purpose of securing social control, that it is of great importance to understand what were the tendencies to act which preceded the action. It is also necessary to know the origin of such tendencies and how they may be modified.

In a consideration of the total behavior, this phase of subjective experience, designated as the inner attitude, constitutes a part of the act which we believe to be of vital importance in the determining of conduct and a valuable concept which can be used as a unit of measurement of change. It is true that such a unit is subjective rather than objective, and that it is difficult to ascertain as well as to measure. However, as Dr. Faris says: "What is needed is, not the denial of the difficult, but hard thinking and hard labor in the effort to devise means to wrest the secrets of nature from her in the realm of personality, as men in natural science have done in their field."¹

The social object chosen for the purpose of this investigation is a group composed of two mission schools in Bolivia, South America, known as the American Institutes. Personal acquaintance of the writer with the first teachers and students, as well as participation in the activities of these schools for almost twenty years, has made it possible to trace their development

¹Ellsworth Faris, American Journal of Sociology, September, 1928, p. 276.

from the time of their establishment in the cities of La Paz and Cochabamba in the years 1907 and 1912 respectively, until the present time. Although located in two distinct cities of the republic, yet their form of organization has been the same, many teachers have taught in both institutions, and students frequently have passed from one school to another. The number of students enrolled is sufficiently limited for the purposes of research, and at the same time extensive enough to allow for comparison of data.

An effort was made to understand the social culture which lies back of the group and of which the individual students form an integral part. Before they entered the American Institutes, the existing order had left its impress of social attitudes, and continued to influence them to a greater or less degree according to the closeness of the relationship with the outside social group.

In these schools a somewhat different type of social culture has been developed through the influence of the North American and Bolivian teachers, as well as the graduates and older students who have contributed to the total environment. For some students, especially those who live in the boarding departments, the relationships have been very close with the new form of social life, while with others the contacts have been stronger with the outside social background. In order to understand the differences which might exist within the school environment, a detailed study was made of its activities, traditions and loyalties, as well as the relationships which existed between its various members.

A large amount of material was secured from the school publications, such as the yearly catalogues, printed reports, student papers and annuals. Clippings from outside newspapers for a period of years were valuable in indicating the attitudes of the outside social group as related to the schools. Student papers,

records of student organizations, and the faculty minutes gave certain information as to the student opinions, as well as the relationships existing between students and teachers.

The experimental method was used with a certain degree of effectiveness, by which the same group was studied under different situations to discover if possible the changes which might have occurred, and what were the influences which contributed to bring about such a change. Comparisons were also made between students in different grades, between those in the day-school or in the boarding department, between students and graduates, between the Institutes in La Paz and Cochabamba, as well as between the Institute students and those in the national schools. The questionnaire method was used for the most part in making these comparisons, as it is possible to secure some form of quantitative measurement from the compilation and classification of the answers, but care was always used to secure the free expression of opinion and to determine from other sources the validity of their statements.

Material of a more personal character was secured from letters and life-histories. Correspondence between teachers and students, between parents and teachers, or parents and their children in school, and between the students themselves furnished some of the best material. The life-histories were especially valuable in portraying the growing personality in different situations, as they describe more thoroughly the process of social change than do isolated extracts from a small portion of the individual's life.

Overt acts of behavior, both during the school period, as well as after graduation, and the observations of persons associated with the individual students in their various phases of activity were used to verify conclusions secured from the above named sources. Intimate acquaintance with most of these students for a

long period of time, and the position of the investigator as a participator in the social group was of help in securing the material, as well as in the comparison of data and in drawing correct inferences from it. In the use of these various methods, both the impersonal and the personal, the objective and the subjective factors were taken into consideration in the endeavor to discover the underlying attitudes as well as the process of change.

2. Analysis of Changing Social Attitudes

In a careful analysis of the various sources of material, certain general changes in social attitudes were noted, classified and compared. The changes were in no sense uniform for the entire group of students nor for the whole period of time since the organization of these schools, but certain general trends may be seen.

A study of the publications showed that there was a fluctuation in the interests of the student body in accordance with the variations in the school and general social environment. The principal topics which occupied the largest percentage of space in the student publications as well as the faculty minutes were those classified under the general headings of Religion and Morals, Athletics, and Literature or Education, which correspond to the triangular emblem of the school, representing the harmonious development of the Soul, Mind, and Body. In the first publications of the Institute, as well as in the national daily papers, none of these topics hold first place, but after ten years of educational development of the American Institutes, they come to occupy the most important place in later years. The relative importance of these topics varies, however, according to the interest and activities of certain teachers or groups of students who influence the general student body and help to form the spirit of the school

environment.

The interests of the total social background also leave their impression on the student activities and thought. During the early years of the American Institutes, there was a close relation of the school to the government authorities, owing to the fact that it received a government subvention, and at that time the student publications devote more space to topics of national interest than they do in the following years. However, since the war between Bolivia and Paraguay has occupied the attention of the entire country, this agitation is reflected in the student papers which show the highest percentage of material devoted to patriotic subjects for any period, even surpassing the national school papers in this respect.

The comparative tests also indicate the relationships that exist between the individual and the group of which he forms a part, or between the group and the general environment. The students from the boarding departments live the greater part of the year in more direct contact with the teachers than do the day-pupils and therefore partake more readily of their attitudes, especially with regard to moral and religious ideals. Also special groups of day-pupils after a period of time in which they participate in some common enterprise or special instruction, share in the common attitudes of the group arising from the new experiences.

In a comparison between the students of the American Institutes and the national schools, the Institute students surpass those of the national schools in the percentage of frequency of mention for all topics except those related to intellectual and economic interests. In these two topics, however, it is noted that the Institute students are more interested in the phases of education related to scientific subjects, while the national pupils

manifest more interest in literary topics. In the consideration of the national and world problems, the Institute students would give a greater place to the economic phases of development, while the personal economic problem concerns the national student to a greater extent. The national students are especially interested in general social movements, such as communism, socialism, nazism, while the Institute students are more concerned with the solving of certain local social problems arising from the class distinction in the country and the problem of the education of the Indian. Such differences in interest and thought may be traced to the variation in the school environments, as well as to the general background of outside social influence.

The personal documents give a more intimate picture of the general process of change. It will be noted that in each case, as the individual temperaments and environment vary, so will the reactions to each situation. There will not be absolute uniformity, as the situation will never be identical for two individuals. However, certain general tendencies may be noted for those who participate in similar social groups within the same type of environment which indicate the direction of social change.

In a comparison of these various sources of material, there were noted certain important changes in attitude among the students of the American Institutes which may be summarized briefly as follows:

a. Intellectual changes. - (1) An increased desire to study and learn; (2) a broadening of the fields of interest; (3) a change from the memory system of studying to the individual reasoning process; (4) an increased emphasis on the experimental and practical phases of knowledge; (5) the realization that the educational process consists of more than the acquiring of knowledge, it means

the development of the entire personality.

b. Physical changes. - (1) An increased interest in sports of all kinds, including competitive games, exercises, and excursions; (2) a desire to maintain physical health by following rules of good living; (3) an attitude of sportsmanship with the ability to cooperate with others; and (4) the attitude that wholesome living will produce greater intellectual ability and moral character.

c. Moral and religious changes. - (1) The formation of clean, wholesome habits of living; (2) the desire to work collectively for the welfare of humanity; (3) an appreciation of the higher values of life; (4) a recognition of the need for a religious faith to secure the greatest development; and (5) a greater tolerance and liberality with regard to all religious faiths.

d. General social, domestic, and economic changes. - (1) An increased sociability; (2) happiness in social relations; (3) a spirit of companionship with added respect for the other sex; (4) higher ideals for family and home life; (5) recognition of the higher place which should be granted women; (6) an increased love for work, including manual labor; and (7) an interest in the more practical occupations.

e. Changes with regard to national and international problems. - (1) An increased interest in developing the natural resources of the country and national industries as a means of solving their economic problems; (2) a desire to secure the education of the Indian with greater opportunities for all social classes; (3) an interest in better administrations in the government with more honesty in the elections and the elimination of party prejudices; (4) a more friendly attitude towards other countries; (5) a desire for arbitration rather than war in the solving of international difficulties; and (6) the awakening of a sincere interest

to render the best service possible to their country.

3. The Process of Social Change

We have described the social object which we are studying in this investigation and have indicated certain trends of change in social attitudes as manifested in the various sources of original material. We shall not attempt here to evaluate these changes as such evaluation will vary according to the viewpoint of the person judging. What is of special interest to us is the process of change, the method by which one group may impose its attitudes on another, or how new attitudes are created.

In considering the origin of social attitudes, Dr. Faris says: "The Problem of the genesis of attitudes is one aspect of the general problem of emotional disorganization and rational reorganization..... New objects do not arise merely as the effects of social values and preceding attitudes, but as a result of conflict, crisis, and reintegration wherein social and individual forces and antecedents are in some form of opposition."¹

In the analysis which we have made of changing social attitudes in the American Institutes of Bolivia, we may note that greater changes have occurred in conflict situations. For the attitudes related to intellectual activities, although here there was noted on the part of many students a broadening of interests with a greater desire to learn, there was not the decided change, when compared with the national schools, that was found in other phases of their activities.

For physical changes, there was noted an increased interest in sports, wholesome living and physical development, but the greatest change came in learning to cooperate with others on the

¹Ellsworth Faris, "Concept of Social Attitudes," Journal of Applied Sociology, IX (1925), pp. 405-8.

team and in being a good sport. In such cases, there existed a conflict between the individual and the social interests, in the desire to win personal glory or a victory for the group. In the critical moments of the game, in the time of intense emotional stirrings, the new attitude was born of a higher loyalty in the midst of a conflict of loyalties.

The greatest frequency of mention for any group of topics are those relative to existing standards of conduct and belief, which have been classified under moral and religious changes. Difficulties have arisen in the interpretation of what may be considered moral conduct, as standards vary according to the viewpoint of the person judging. One student said that the North American teachers were liberal as to creed, but dogmatic concerning conduct, while the Catholic priests were liberal as to conduct but dogmatic concerning creed. A dogmatic attitude on the part of any teacher with regard to a question of either conduct or creed constitutes a barrier to the mutual sharing of attitudes in new experiences. However, in these conflict situations, whenever the reorganization has taken place in an atmosphere of cooperative judgment, new attitudes have been formed which have resulted in an appreciation of the higher values of life.

For social and economic relationships, various conflict situations may be noted. To violate any social custom, as, for example, not to wear mourning when a near relative dies, precipitates an inner as well as an external conflict. To accept as a friend a boy or girl of a lower social class, regardless of all class distinctions, is frequently the cause of conflict with the parents or other friends of the immediate social group. The willingness to do manual labor, putting oneself on the level of the Indian class, is a change which could not take place without a

conflict in the individual's mind concerning his social status. To refuse to take charge of a father's estate, because it would signify holding the Indian in his present servile condition implies an inner as well as an outer conflict.

In the questions related to national and international problems, in addition to those which arise from the general social and economic situations, various conflicts may arise as to whether one should work for personal advancement in public positions or for the general welfare of the country. The recent international conflict presented many difficult problems to the young people of the country. Should war or arbitration be used for the settling of international difficulties? In the midst of a national crisis, what is the duty of the individual? What is the highest expression of patriotism? How may those who truly love their country best help in its reconstruction and development? In the midst of these times of emotional crisis has come a newer conception of the relation of the individual to the group, or as one student said, the rebirth or awakening of the nation.

We may see in these various conflict situations the emotional disorganization, previously mentioned, the disintegration of earlier feelings and attitudes. As a result of the critical experiences, the older attitude will be fused together into a new attitude which will be a part of the reorganized personality.

However, not in all situations will there be conflict, if the attitudes of the new social group coincide with the preexisting attitudes. The educational process may reinforce attitudes acquired previously in the home, or if the student enters school at an early age, he may take over the attitudes of his teachers without any noticeable conflict. This formation of approved habits and attitudes is a part of the general program of social education.

There are many factors which enter into the formation of the social character with the desired attitudes and responses. The individuality of each reacting organism and the methods of approach will affect the reorganization of previous attitudes in each new situation. Znaniecki says:

Given an act performed or indicated, or a belief expressed by one individual in the presence of another, usually the latter does not react by repeating the act or echoing the belief, but in some way entirely different - perhaps by counteracting or opposing, perhaps by supplementing or developing the act or belief, perhaps by utilizing it for his own purposes, even by starting off on some line of action of his own without any direct practical or logical connection with the first individual's behavior. And if the specific reaction of performing the act or echoing the belief actually occurs, its form and function vary according to the pre-existing tendency of the subject and his present situation.¹

Dr. Baker in his study of Christian Missions and a New World Culture analyzes the factors which are influential in influencing behavior on the basis of a stimulus-response pattern, but places emphasis on certain methods in the educational process. Suggestion, imitation, persuasion, and deliberation are those of greatest importance, but he considers that only the last two contribute to the highest development of personality.

Different illustrations may be given of the way these various methods have been used within the social group we are studying. Gestures, codes of ethics, mottoes, ideals, and traditions have all been mentioned as having had their influence. One of the school catalogues referred to the "unwritten law." It has been mentioned by some of the students in their personal documents that an Institute student was known by the fact that he did not drink alcoholic liquors or smoke. That was based on a written law within the establishment, but became an unwritten law if he carried out the same form of conduct in his home or on the street. It then

¹Florjan Znaniecki, The Laws of Social Psychology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925), pp. 39,40.

represented an attitude formed within the traditions of the school. One student in writing to his brother said: "Are you still living true to the ideals of the American Institute?" Such ideals had become traditional for the students and as such were potent factors in influencing their behavior.

Imitation may be a way in which one individual within a group takes over the attitudes of another. One teacher says: "I have been rather surprised at times to hear in a round-about way that certain students have expressed their own convictions in my words." The students give many examples of how they have liked the good example and character of their teachers, and have expressed the desire to share in the same attitudes and actions.

Other forms of influencing the students' attitudes, which might be called methods of persuasion, are conferences, lectures, and books. In the reading of the book, there is not the personal element found in hearing an address, but at time it may be more effective, especially if it has an emotional appeal. Such methods of persuasion do not violate personality, when they do not try to impose a set form of doctrine, but rather to instil higher ideals of personal and social development.

The discussion groups, however, which are held within the Institute for the consideration of any problems of vital interest to the students give opportunity for joint deliberation which has been previously mentioned as the preferred method. There is also the intimate personal relationship between all members of the group which lends itself to the give and take method of mutual sharing of ideas and attitudes. Joint discussion and deliberation may take place between two persons, either companions who by sharing their experiences can help each other to form new attitudes, or between older and younger persons, where the former because of

added years of experience may contribute more to the reorganization of the personality in the midst of a critical situation.

It has been found that the various changes in attitudes take place in an atmosphere of emotional intensity. Intellectual reasoning or simple persuasion do not have as much effect as when the desires, the feelings, are involved. It is believed by many sociologists and educationalists that in the intimacy of the primary groups, with the face to face relationships, we find the situation of emotional response to the various stimuli, which is most favorable to the change of social attitudes.

The primary group relationship may be found within larger groups, which are frequently classified as secondary groups. Cooley says that what is necessary for the formation of the primary group is "the certain intimacy and fusion of personalities. Primary groups are primary in the sense that they give the individual his earliest and completest experience of social unity, and also in the sense that they do not change in the same degree as more elaborate relations, but form a comparatively permanent source out of which the latter are ever springing."¹ He believes that in these groups are formed the majority of our social attitudes.

In the social group which we are studying, we have an institution which may represent a secondary, rather than a primary form of relationship. In the formal education, with its rules for the regulation of conduct and standardized forms of instruction, we have an example of the intellectual rather than emotional form of control. However, in the social relationship which may exist between the pupils, between the pupils and the teachers, especially in the boarding department, or between the teachers and the

¹Charles Horton Cooley, Social Organization (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), p. 32.

parents, we may find smaller groups of the primary type in which the face to face relationship predominates, with its emotional preferences, which we believe to be most effective in helping to reorganize the attitudes which have been disintegrated in the various conflict situations resulting from different types of social cultures.

The forming of a social personality is essential to the process of social change, and it is necessary that the relation of the individual to the group be maintained. If he is separated from the rest of his group or from the teacher by a severe punishment, there is not the sharing of attitudes. Punishments, which are entirely unrelated to cause and natural effect, and which are based on authority rather than cooperative judgment, increase the social distance between the teacher and the student and destroy the face to face relationship which we consider necessary for the changing of attitudes.

In the American Institutes, there have been instances of the types of control which have been vindictive rather than reformatory, and which have produced hostile rather than helpful attitudes on the part of the students. Also there have been teachers who have maintained the formal relations with their students rather than the familiar sharing of experiences, yet we find to a larger degree examples of the type of informal control which have been an aid to the reorganization of the social attitudes of the students. In questions of discipline an effort has been made to establish a form of relationship between the teachers and students which shall promote social education.

Many have referred to the atmosphere of the school as being that of a home rather than an educational institution. A graduate said: "the American Institute is not a temple of science,

but a home for the children." It is in these informal relationships where the students take part in the games, the work, as well as the conversations with the teachers, wherever a teacher manifests a friendly attitude with a feeling of trust and confidence in the students, that they share in the social experiences which are the basis of their new attitudes. Park and Burgess say that "as the self expands to include other selves, as in sympathy and in fellowship, there is an extension of self-feeling to the whole group. Self-consciousness passes over in the rapport thus established into group consciousness."¹

This feeling of rapport which we find between teachers and students, according to Park, "implies the existence of a mutual responsiveness, such that every member of the group reacts immediately, spontaneously and sympathetically to the sentiments and attitudes of every other member."² We may thus find changes in attitudes of teachers who come to share in this group, because not only will the students react to the attitudes of the teachers, but they in like degree will respond to the attitudes of the students. It is in a mutual sharing that the lives of both are enriched, and we find the most significant expression of the true missionary purpose, which should seek the highest development of all personality, or in the words of Jesus Christ, "a more abundant life."

4. General Conclusions

We have briefly indicated the general trend of certain specific changes in social attitudes among the students of the American Institutes of Bolivia. These changes have not been uniform throughout the years since the establishment of these schools, but

¹R. E. Park and E. W. Burgess, Introduction to the Science of Sociology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), p. 440.

²Ibid., p. 893.

have all varied in accordance with the significant movements in the general social background, the individual home environment, as well as the predominating interests of the special school environment. But in a study of the process by which these changes have taken place, we have noted certain general principles which we hope will be of value in the furthering of the study of the process of social control.

The process of education should reinforce all desirable attitudes as found in the existing social culture and endeavor to form new ones only in those cases where a change will produce a higher personal and social development. In the situation where a conflict arises between the old and new form of social culture, an emotional disorganization takes place, a disintegration of previous attitudes. In the reorganization there may be a fusion of the various conflicting tendencies or the organization around some center of reference, from which results a new attitude, or the "residual tendency."

In the process of reorganization, the relation of the individual to the social group is of the greatest importance. If the relationship to the previous culture and its social groupings is strong, its attitudes will predominate. If the new social group is formed on the basis of the primary, face to face relationship with its emotional immediacy, its attitudes will readily be taken over by the new members. A failure to obtain or maintain this relationship through the increasing of social distance, as usually occurs in the use of punishment and other means of formal control, will retard or prevent the desired reorganization of the personality with new social attitudes.

It is believed from the study of the material secured in this investigation that the American Institutes for the most part,

in the intimacy of a personal, primary group relationship where the members share in mutual experiences, constitute an effective agency for social control. The following quotation from a graduate of these schools to a former teacher expresses his aspirations with regard to the future of this institution and the place it may have in the social progress of Bolivia.

In my imagination I see the Institute educating thousands of pupils, with an enormous plant, having in addition to the secondary course, the advanced university courses. I believe that when I am fifty years old, there will have been a revolution, a complete transformation in the educational methods of Bolivia. The revolution which I hope to help bring about is to be a revolution of ideas and works from my humble position as professor of the American Institute, which will be the fountain of wisdom, the crucible where will be formed the men who will regenerate Bolivia. - Student No. 386.

